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NEWS RELEASE



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State, unions sign labor agreement for Fairweather

(Juneau) – State labor negotiators have reached an agreement with the two remaining labor unions involved in operations of the MV Fairweather, approving a contract to return the state's first fast-ferry to regular operations in time for the summer tourism season.

The operating contract was approved by negotiators representing the Masters, Mates and Pilots and the Marine Engineers Beneficial Association. The Fairweather could be back in service on or before March 24.

Terms of the contract allow for the Fairweather to be operated by a single crew four days a week during the winter months between October and May. Two crews will man the vessel seven days a week during the busy summer months. The contract also gives the state flexibility to determine appropriate crew levels to meet future winter passenger demand.

"We are pleased to have agreement on the first comprehensive contract under U.S. labor law for operation of a high speed ferry," said Governor Frank H. Murkowski. "Now we have an agreement that lets us deliver reliable service to the traveling public in a way that the state can afford,"

The state negotiating team included Art Chance, director of labor relations for the Alaska Department of Administration; Nancy Sutch, chief spokesperson; and John Torgerson, special assistant to the commissioner at the Department of Transportation and Public Facilities.

Monetary terms of the three-year agreement remain confidential until they have been reviewed by union membership.

Capt. Steve Demeroutis was the chief negotiator for the MM&P and Bud Jacque represented MEBA. Daryl Tseu led the Inland Boatman's Union of the Pacific, which previously reached agreement with the state.

"Negotiations were lengthy and tough, but we thank the labor leaders for their hard work and creativity," said Commissioner of Administration Raymond Matiasowski. "And this

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agreement gives us a template for future high-speed craft such as the Chenega.” The MV Chenega is scheduled to begin serving Prince William Sound in July.

“It was a very difficult decision to tie up the Fairweather until we achieved these agreements,” said state DOT&PF Commissioner Mike Barton. “But now, the agreements will go a long way toward providing continued service by the Fairweather within a reasonable budget.”

Barton said returning the Fairweather to service is made more complicated by the fact that senior crew members who “bumped back” into the rest of the fleet while labor negotiations continued must now be returned to the fast-ferry without disrupting other ferry operations.

By reaching this agreement with the three unions on the Fairweather, the master contract covering all ferry crews can now go to the Legislature for consideration, Matiashowski said.

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